

Rationale for Granting Years of Service Credit to Educational Staff Associates

Shortages

Currently there is a shortage of related service staff (occupational and physical therapists (OT/PT), speech language pathologists (SLP), school nurses, school psychologists, counselors, and social workers). These related service employees are known as educational staff associates (ESAs). Due to low salaries, compared to health and private sector employers, turnover is high.

- **Example** - During the 2004-05 school year in the Kent School District (KSD), the school year started with more than six SLP vacancies and one OT vacancy. This created the potential for many students to be under served or not served at all during that time.
- **Example** - During the present school year (2005-06), the Kent School District has **16.1 FTE** of contracted ESA employees compared to a total of **50.5 FTE ESAs** who are KSD employees. The KSD special education department employs **208** certificated staff.
- **Example** - An OSPI ESA shortage report for 2002 indicated a total shortage of 857 ESAs in Washington or an average of 122 in each of seven ESA fields. A current 2004 shortage report is due to be released anytime.

Students that are un-served or underserved put districts in a high risk position for incurring legal costs that could be better spent serving students. There is also a significant cost to districts when they must advertise, recruit, interview, hire, and train new educational staff associates (ESAs) year after year. When ESAs are not available for district hiring, school districts are forced to pay higher hourly rates to agencies for "temporary services." If a district later wishes to hire the "temporary" employee, the district must pay a finder's fee of more than \$5,000. It is less expensive to attract and pay educational staff associates than to hire agency "temporary" employees at a higher rate to fill vacant positions.

- **Example** - During the 2004-05 school year KSD paid an average hourly cost of **\$64.51** per hour for agency contracted ESA staff (SLP, OT, PT, school psychologist), compared to an average hourly cost of **\$42.63** (including benefits) for an ESA district employee.
- **Example** - The above noted difference in cost resulted in the KSD expenditure of **\$2,855,527** in 2004-05 and the projected expenditure of **\$2,892,347** in 2005-06 for contracted services. Given that unfilled positions must be converted to a non-employee related cost (NERC) in order to pay for the services of contracted employees, there is an additional loss to the district. The NERC amount converts to the average open position amount, which in Kent, equals a BA+90 with ten years of experience. Given that most ESA staff must have a Masters Degree in order to be eligible for certification, that is an immediate loss of buying power due to the loss of revenue generation via the mix factor.

In concrete dollars, this means approximately **\$48, 893** converted to the non-employee cost center compared to an average of **\$93,941** spent on a contracted salary.

Quality and Continuity of Care

- Special education students will be ensured of consistently provided related services (required by law when on the student's IEP) versus the potential of experiencing a gap in services when ESA positions are unfilled. When students are not served or are under served, districts face the high and very costly risk of legal action.
- More competition for school positions because of competitive wages (compared to the health and private sectors) will lead to increased quality of ESA service.
- With competitive salaries, ESAs will be more "invested" in the field of education. They will also be more knowledgeable about the culture of the educational world versus the medical world and be better prepared to deal with the needs of students and their families.
- Increased commitment to the school district will result in greater employee satisfaction; increased longevity of employment; greater continuity of working relationships with school staff, students, and families; and better care and education.

Recruitment and Retention

- Past professional experience outside of education is currently not recognized by the state salary scale.
- School district employment results in a significant cut in pay for experienced professionals.
- School districts will be able to attract and retain therapists with other professional experiences in their respective fields. These ESAs would be valuable additions to the schools and many would be interested in transferring to a school-based practice if they knew that they would receive fair compensation for their valuable and relevant experience outside of the educational setting.

If you have any questions, please contact:

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